

# NORA

## DIRECTORS STATEMENT

When I sat down to write *Nora*, I had one goal. Honesty. I wanted to be honest about the place that made me who I am. I wanted to paint an honest portrait of the people that raised me, and I wanted to reflect the American culture that seldom gets portrayed in cinema. The film takes place in rural Indiana, the very place that I was born. More specifically the film is set in a farming community. It just so happens that my home state was one of the first to declare our current President as their own on election night. I felt that this decision didn't summarize the soil that I grew from, nor did it summarize my family that cultivates that land. There is a disconnect between the blue collar worker and the ruthless passing of our times. I want this story to serve as a flag in the ground for their reality, separate from the world's agenda, but not unaffected. In this story America has fallen into another Great Depression. I want to show how slowly the "backbone" of America can eventually slouch into hopelessness without having much of a say in the matter. A farmer's household and livelihood relies on three things, the weather, the stock prices of their commodities, and their faith that what they put in the ground will come up. That life requires equal doses of hard work and faith. The American farmer often goes unthanked, and unrewarded. A good year can garner high taxes and strict contracts, so why do they continue? The answer is tradition, for better or for worse it is in their blood. I wanted their experience to be seen and told from the perspective of a young immigrant. This allows for a genuine and innocent view of the good and the bad of the American working class.

More specifically this story is told from the perspective of Nora a twenty year old immigrant girl. With fear of being linked to her family's tie to a violent act in the Middle East, Nora latches on to an opportunity to live off the grid on a secluded family plot with Gabe, the youngest son of a third generation farming family. The story does not start there, first I wanted to show the everyday lifestyle of a young man and his brother with the weight of responsibility on their shoulders, the weight of a life's work being passed on to them. Should this be seen as a birthright or a burden? The film begins in the last flickering moments of Gabe and his brother Mason's youth, before they are forced to become adults and confront the unapologetic reality of a failing economy. They are reckless and rightfully so, as their bleak future looms, but there is another side to that burdened coin. The tradition that Gabe is taking on, is that of great pride. The unfortunate truth is that by the time it is Gabe's turn to take the reigns of the operation, the world is not what it was when his Great Grandfather started it.

*Nora* has seen first hand how hostile this world can be. For an immigrant to experience the daily grind of an American grain farmer is a collision and juxtaposition not of difference, but of empathy. I feel that regardless of upbringing or heritage, each person has good within them. The question for me is not of differences in ethnicity, but of similarities of the soul. I want to create a new experience for audiences unlike any they have seen. I'm trying to tell a story bigger than a common first feature for a director. I don't think there is any shame in striving for more than the stays quo. The grain belt is more than just fields, it is a culture of sweat, blood, love and faith. Through *Nora's* eyes, this setting reveals it's true beauty, not in it's vast landscapes, but in it's people. Although the film takes place in an economic downfall, I feel that this amplified circumstance sheds light on very real issues that are not far from reality. Many of these scenes are taken directly from my personal real life experiences and I think there is no better time to gift this small pocket of America a genuine voice. Not of bigoted ignorance, but a culture of complex love and labor. I cannot argue that there are individuals that represent the coarse distaste for cultures differing from their own. They are present, but this story does not focus on them. If you want that, watch the news. This story is about legacy and responsibility. As a young man strives to find the "American Dream" through endless sweat and opposition, I find it elegant that a refugee finds it for herself with a resilient spirit and strong will.

I am a fourth generation son in a family of farmers. I did not take over for my father, as he did for his ect. My family saw that my heart was elsewhere and gracefully released me into the wild to be an artist, and now a filmmaker. I must honor that gesture and make my choice worth it. I have my whole soul in this project. "*Nora*" is a love letter to the life and responsibility that I gave up. I strive to honor my upbringing with my craft, and make sure that the America I know is woven deeply into the fabric of this narrative.

- SKYLER LAWSON